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Blockade: Why this 19th Century Nelsonian Tool Remains Operationally Relevant Today

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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Abstract

The age-old concept of naval blockade remains a viable option for Joint Force Commanders in future contingencies, provided its limitations and strengths are clearly understood. Under the right circumstances, blockade can be a determining factor across the range of military operations, from coercion to major war. This paper tests blockade's potential in the 21st century against the backdrop of three modern case studies – the U.S. blockades of North and South Vietnam, the coalition blockade of Iraq, and the Israeli blockade of Lebanon/Hezbollah. Blockade is analyzed in the context of the operational factors of time, space, and force, as well as its indirect effects on an enemy. The significant role technology and politics can have are also noted. Finally, this paper addresses the paucity of doctrine and written guidance to properly employ blockade, and makes recommendations to improve the visibility of this operational tool in the joint mindset.

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Even though blockades take a long time to work, are difficult to implement with high effectiveness, are blunt rather than sharp policy instruments, and frequently cause unintended harm to innocent parties, they offer a less dramatic and less politically polarizing alternative to combat…Accordingly, blockades will continue to be a serious option for the United States in the future security environment, and the Navy (with possible assistance from the Coast Guard) will be the at-sea instrument of any blockade.[i] – Roger Barnett, 1992

In today's world of counter-insurgency operations, land-centric conflicts, and distributed acts of terror, classic operational concepts heavy in sea power, such as blockade, have seemingly lost their relevance. After all, the term blockade often evokes Barnett's blunt and slow instrument, and appears ill equipped and not flexible enough for a joint force commander (JFC) in today's environment of precise, surgical military operations. Fittingly, most of the seminal theory and critical thought on the utility of blockades began in the age of Nelson, and later evolved with the naval theorists Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan early in the twentieth century. One of the better discussions of blockade by Mahan actually followed an article in a naval periodical describing the attributes of a messenger-pigeon service for ships at sea.[ii] The year was 1895.

Blockade is a confusing and misinterpreted tool, made more so by contradictory international and customary law, as well as varying objectives for its use. In the past, it has been used to lure out an adversary's fleet, interdict war materials, or crush the will of a people through economic deprivation, starvation and want. The effectiveness of a blockade can be limited or negated by constraints of time, space, and force. It may be difficult to justify to neutral states in a globalized community. And, many poor, landlocked nations lacking in trade may be impervious to its effects (numerous African nations and Afghanistan come to mind). Given the problematic nature of blockade and today's strategic environment,

does it remain a relevant and viable tool at the operational level of war for the joint force commander? What factors might relegate blockade to the dustbin of obsolete maneuvers, like bayonet charges and battleship engagements before it?

With the recent unveiling of a new maritime strategy in the United States, these questions are certainly pertinent. While blockade is an old and worn concept, it may not be an outdated one. The ocean still has strategic importance for maritime nations, and population centers and trade near and on the seas have exploded in the last half of the 20th century. Ninety percent of the world's commerce travels by sea (or the air above it) as does two thirds of the world's oil supply.[iii] Ships transport food and arms by water over much of the earth. Even with rogue and failing states, and the growth of non-state actors, blockade is still a viable tool for nations wishing to exert their unilateral or collective will. For the joint force commander and the nation or coalition he represents, blockade should remain in consideration as an option for deterrence, coercion, and escalation during limited or unlimited war. Under the right circumstances, it has been - and will continue to be – an effective method for controlling entry and denying access to the sea.

Background

Blockades, by their very history and nature, are naval operations. They are a means to an end, and can have a pronounced effect at both the operational and strategic levels of war. Corbett in 1911 stated, "Under the term blockade, we include operations which vary widely in character and in strategic intention."[iv] Interestingly, the tenets of blockade are even more misunderstood today. They can be partial or total, limited or unlimited, porous or tight, close or distant.[v] Quarantine, contraband control, embargoes, sanction enforcement, maritime interdiction, and enforcement of exclusion zones have all been used since the close

of World War II as a variation of (or another name for) blockade. Blockade is, according to U.S. Naval law, a "belligerent operation intended to prevent vessels and/or aircraft of all nations from entering or exiting specified ports, airfields, or coastal areas which are under the sovereignty, under the occupation, or under the control of an enemy nation."[vi] This definition is a suitable starting point, and has evolved from the traditional description to now include the airspace above the seas as well as airfields within the blockaded area. Corbett makes a further distinction with blockade being either intended for naval or commercial use.[vii] In its naval capacity the blockading commander, using superior forces, intends to either trap an enemy's warships in port (thereby rendering them useless) or encourage them to seek battle at sea. Blockade in this role is a method of securing sea control in order to achieve freedom of action. In the commercial sense, blockade operations were initiated to "stop the flow of the enemy's sea borne trade, whether carried in his own or neutral bottoms, by denying him the use of trade communications."[viii] Both of these objectives remain applicable today, but perhaps the latter has the greater potential for future use. For the purposes herein, both the economic and the military (naval) goals of blockade will be considered.

Legally speaking, blockade is the child of international and customary law. Harvard law scholar Thomas Jones states "through silence and acquiescence, the naval tactics and strategies which developed and resulted in the law of blockade have become accepted as legally permissible procedures by neutral states and belligerent parties."[ix] While a detailed history of the evolution of blockade law is not relevant to this argument, there is value for the operational commander in understanding contemporary legal allowances and limitations. In the strictest interpretation, blockades are an act of war. Some would argue that because of

advances in technology and tactics and the inability of the law to keep pace, traditional blockade has become obsolete.[x] Yet precedence has demonstrated that blockades can be effectively employed by nations in circumstances short of war. The U.S. blockade of North Vietnam, the blockade imposed by the U.S. during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the coalition blockade of Iraq from 1990-2003 are but three examples of effective blockades imposed prior to or in lieu of war. Interestingly, because of the question of legality and need for international legitimacy, none were called a "blockade" at the time. Modern practice has shown that states will continue to employ blockade, regardless of declared war or customary law, as long as it suits their operational and strategic objectives, they maintain superior naval forces, and they comply with blockade's fundamental criteria. If properly *declared*, if other affected nations are *notified*, if it is *effective* in its purpose, and if it is *impartial*, then the blockade is considered valid.[xi] Lastly, when declaring a blockade, the law permits only governments to do so, thus a U.S. operational commander must seek approval through the chain of command to the President. This fact does not prohibit the Commander from planning or executing a blockade when deemed appropriate, only that the action is then confirmed by the government.[xii]

History serves as a point of reference and departure when discussing the future utility of blockade. Modern blockade – those after World War II – have greater applicability for the joint and maritime planners of the future, and not only because of closer technological ties like the airplane and satellite. Blockades in World War II and prior tended to be unlimited, seeking not only the destruction of the enemy's navy but also the complete submission of the enemy's populace and erosion of their will to support the fight. As Mahan points out, "the blockade is a belligerent measure that touches every member of the hostile

community, and, by thus distributing the evils of war, as insurance distributes the burden of other losses, it brings them home to every man."[xiii] This was true of the American Civil War, World War II, and especially World War I, often called the "Starvation Blockade" of Imperial Germany. As an illustration, by 1917 the Allied blockade of Germany caused the nutrition of the population to be less than 30% of its prewar level.[xiv] This type of protracted, total blockade, however, is only palatable in total war, when the necessity of starving an enemy's civilians is considered the only reasonable method to ensure one's own survival. While certainly *possible* in the first half of the 21st century, a global war of unlimited means does not seem *probable* in today's security environment.

Many modern blockades hold valuable lessons for today's operational commanders and demonstrate blockade's future viability. U.S. brinkmanship during the Cuban Missile Crisis and British naval interventions in Rhodesia (the Beira Patrol) and the Falklands are but three examples. The case studies chosen here likewise reflect a broad sampling of the benefits and limitations of blockade. Included for the purposes of this discussion are: a blockade by a strong sea power against conventional and irregular forces in a limited, regional conflict (the U.S. in Vietnam); a multi-national blockade to enforce stringent sanctions and compel a regional aggressor to behave (the coalition against Iraq); and a blockade of a state harboring hostile elements by a mid-tier naval nation (the Israeli blockade of Hezbollah in Lebanon). Each is examined and discussed at the operational level of war, and analyzed in the context of the operational factors of time, space and force to determine blockade's effectiveness. Furthermore, each shows blockade's potential and limitations in varying political situations, the effects of technology proliferation, and blockade as a means of "winning without killing".[xv] For the JFC, blockade can serve as an indirect attack against

the enemy's operational and strategic centers of gravity, offering greater military flexibility and fewer casualties. The cases of Vietnam, Iraq, and Lebanon highlight these points.

Vietnam, A Tale of Two Blockades

The U.S. blockade of Vietnam is a tale of two blockades: one large and porous, the other tightly defined and effective. Commander, U.S. Seventh Fleet (and later his Task Force-115 Commander) instituted the first, dubbed *Operation Market Time*, early in the conflict. Its objective was really a self-blockade[xvi] of South Vietnam, meant to starve the Viet Cong insurgency of war materials and supplies transported by sea. It was huge, encompassing over 1400 nautical miles of South Vietnamese coastline and extended into three layers of depth into the South China Sea. While many in the Navy lobbied to blockade North Vietnam, political restraints forced the blockaders to "do it the hard way by stopping up the broad end of the funnel".[xvii] A dozen or more picket destroyers, thirty-six cutters from the Coast Guard, eighty-four aluminum-hulled swift boats, numerous small craft and dedicated squadrons of maritime patrol aircraft comprised the force.[xviii] The latter flew from as far away as the Philippines and Thailand, and afforded the blockaders an advantage perhaps comparable to Nelson's fast frigates of old. Their "eyes and ears" capability added a dimension of persistent surveillance and operations in depth. These forces performed well given the extensive space with which they had to contend. In three years, *Market Time* forces sank or captured more than fifty infiltrating vessels and "virtually choked off all seaborne infiltration by steel-hulled trawlers into the Republic of Vietnam."[xix] Future initiatives, including *Operations Game Warden* and *Sea Lords*, were similarly effective in internal riverine regions with fast patrol boats and helicopters.

While the maritime patrol was significant, a like-minded ground and air force capable of interdicting weapons and contraband from internal borders fell well short. The Tet Offensive best illustrated this shortcoming in 1968. It was obvious at that point that the North Vietnam regulars and insurgents were still able to procure war materials of sufficient supply. Essentially, *Market Time* had compelled the North Vietnamese and Vet Cong to develop alternate lines of communication and supply, mostly along the Cambodian border and through the Ho Chi Minh Trail in neighboring Laos. Due to the political restraints imposed for operations outside the confines of South Vietnam, operational commanders were not able to fully leverage the gains of the *Market Time* blockade in the theater. The politics, however, would be much more accommodating by 1972.

If the five-year self-blockade of the Republic of Vietnam was porous and ultimately ineffective, then the second blockade at the close of the conflict was its antithesis. Much smaller in terms of space, time and force, it focused upon mining Haiphong harbor and other key ports in North Vietnam. It was also extremely effective. In May 1972, President Nixon announced:

> *All entrances to North Vietnamese ports will be mined to prevent access to these ports and North Vietnamese naval operations from these ports. United States forces have been directed to take appropriate measures within the internal and clamed territorial waters of North Viet-Nam to interdict the delivery of any supplies. Rail and all other communications will be cut off to the maximum extent possible. Air and naval strikes against military targets in North Viet-Nam will continue.*[xx]

This focused and coordinated effort was in response to a large North Vietnamese incursion into the Republic of Vietnam, and meant to protect U.S. forces as they continued their withdrawal. Notice of the blockade was given to all concerned states, a three-day grace period (the mines were equipped with delayed activation features) was afforded to merchant ships in port, and all other caveats for legality were met. With mines as the tool, it was

certainly impartial; as evidenced by the almost complete cutoff of waterborne trade, the blockade was also operationally effective. Over the course of the next eight months, over 11,000 mines were laid in the ports and territorial waters of North Vietnam, including many by USAF B-52's.[xxi] Once in place, the naval force necessary to maintain, re-seed and notify others of the minefield was markedly less than that required during *Market Time*. Overall, *Operation Pocket Money,* as it was known, closed three major enemy ports for 300 days, halted all North Vietnamese exports, and reduced total imports into the country by 30%. Indirectly, the blockade improved the effectiveness of the air bombing campaign (*Linebacker*) over the North, as materials were diverted to rail vice sea, and therefore more susceptible to attack.[xxii] It also reiterated to U.S. Commanders that naval blockade need not be by naval vessels alone; low-cost mines placed in an area of critical importance to the enemy (a main port) afforded the opportunity to plug the narrow end of the funnel. Many Navy assets were now free to contribute to the conflict elsewhere. In the end, operational commanders were given the freedom to choose such a blockade due to a change in the international climate – specifically a less confrontational approach by the PRC and USSR. *Pocket Money* was a logical, effective, and efficient choice on the palette of operational art, and had significant effects at the higher levels of war. It brought parties to the peace table, and proved the precept (at least in these latter stages) of winning without killing.

A Coalition of the Many – Iraq

Should the [UN] *Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41* [those not involving force] *would be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore the international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations….*[xxiii]

When considering blockades as an operational tool, a JFC must weigh the factors of space, time, and force. Political and military support for an operation is an additional key

concern. In the case of the coalition blockade of Iraq, both the operational factors and international opinion were favorable for the coalition. Blockade, therefore, would be a useful method of showing resolve, militarily and financially weakening the enemy, all while minimizing friendly ground forces in harm's way.

Iraq's access to the sea is via the Persian Gulf; Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey share land borders with the nation. Due to the considerable lines of communication via land, Iraq could not be effectively contained by maritime blockade alone. After the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Iraq's aggression caused the international community to rally around the Kuwaiti cause. Except for Jordan, Iraq's borders were virtually sealed. A coalition air, sea, and land blockade provided a militarily viable and politically acceptable solution (many did not favor immediate use of force like the U.S.). Jordan did not support the UN resolution, and provided Iraq a path to the Red Sea via its port in al-Aqaba. Hence, the Red Sea as well as the Persian Gulf became the focus area of the blockade.[xxiv] Iraq's capabilities with surface-to-surface and air-to-surface missiles made a relatively distant blockade necessary, in the southern Persian Gulf and outside the range of such threats. Like the Cuban Missile Crisis before it, it was a "special function"[xxv] blockade vice a total one, designed to impact only the regime and its military. It precluded all Iraqi exports and limited imports to those of a humanitarian nature. Because of the need for some traffic to transit unencumbered, mines, of course, were not an option.

Twelve nations contributed to the sanctions enforcement effort, collectively known as the Maritime Interception Force (MIF).[xxvi] The large pool of naval forces available from these nations was critical to ensuring an effective and lasting blockade. During its initial stages, navies enforcing the blockade had much to learn operationally: training of boarding

parties was generally inadequate for the task (U.S. Coast Guard excepted); smugglers were constantly adapting and preying upon physical seams in the complicated command and control; each navy came with their own Rules of Engagement (ROE) and operational limitations; and much of the equipment in use (hard-hull boats, etc.) was not initially suited for the specialized tasks.[xxvii] None of these factors, however, precluded ultimate success. One of the key uses of technology and tactics during this operation was that of force insertion by helicopter (fast-rope) or rigid-hull inflatable boat (RHIBs). Non-compliant vessels could have been difficult to stop given the restrictive ROE in place. Disabling (setting adrift) or sinking a ship in confined waters would have greatly complicated the MIF's difficulties and turned public opinion. Helicopter and RHIB insertion of special forces capable of assuming command of the ship, if necessary, precluded such.[xxviii]

In its first year, the blockade was assessed to have cost Iraq over two billion dollars, 48% of its Gross National Product (GNP).[xxix] By May 1996, over 22,000 ships had been queried, over 10,000 were boarded, and 552 were diverted from their intended ports of call.[xxx] The lengthy operation morphed several times during its existence, through the Gulf War to the Iranian territorial smuggling problem, and into a UN sponsored "oil for food" program. With the removal of an Iraqi defensive mining and missile threat after the Gulf war, the blockade became "close" as well, affording the MIF greater geographic flexibility at a reduction of force. The objectives of the overarching sanctions also changed in that time, from Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait into compliance with UN weapons inspections. By its conclusion in 2003, it was one of the most enduring blockade operations in history. Its effectiveness by many scholars is judged by the lack of material preparedness Iraq displayed at the opening of hostilities in *Operation Iraqi Freedom.* "There can be no doubt that

enforcement of the sanctions progressively debilitated Iraqi combat power to the extent that it could not provide effective conventional resistance to the coalition forces in the 2003 conflict."[xxxi]

Blockade in the 21st Century - Lebanon

For those that believed blockade to be dead, the first attempt of the 21st century argues otherwise. The thirty-four day conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006 demonstrated that blockades could be implemented against nations harboring non-state actors. The Israeli objective for the blockade was to "block the transfer of terrorists and weapons to the terror organizations operating in Lebanon."[xxxii] While certainly not clear, naval law does provide a caveat for blockading a country to affect an insurgency. A blockade of "neutral" territory like Lebanon is permissible if it is judged that the neutral nation is "unable or unwilling to enforce effectively its right of inviolability".[xxxiii] A belligerent may therefore take military actions including blockade to counter those making "unlawful use of that territory".[xxxiv]

The blockade was partial, limited in its strategic objective, and tight in its execution. In other words, it only affected a group of contraband materials (partial), did not seek to overthrow Lebanon/Hezbollah (therefore limited) and was maintained sufficiently to not allow much smuggling (tight). The operation was a joint one, consisting of several Saar-4/5 class coastal patrol frigates and a diesel submarine from the Israeli Navy, as well as an air blockade by the Israeli Air Force. The naval boundaries of the blockade were limited to the Lebanese coast, 105 miles long, and the forces in place were sufficient to render it immediately effective and impartial. However, while the Israeli Navy certainly had superior forces to that of Hezbollah (which had no maritime capability), it was not large enough to

maintain local sea control indefinitely. After a month of "battle stations", the ships' crews were weary, and in need of relief.[xxxv] Intuitively, the further the blockade from the Lebanese coast, the greater force necessary to patrol it, and the busier they would be with neutral traffic. Compounding the force limitations, geographic constraints in the Mediterranean near the Syrian and Cypriot borders, a desire to conduct naval gunfire support, and a perceived lack of threat from the land compelled the Israelis to implement a close blockade.

Critics for some time have claimed that the close blockade is a relic of the past; technology has developed and proliferated to such extent that even underdeveloped militaries can procure powerful anti-access weapons such as high-performance aircraft, mines, submarines and cruise missiles. The Israel-Hezbollah war illustrates this reality. On 21 July, Hezbollah launched a Chinese C-802 anti-ship missile from the shore, striking the stern of INS *Hanit* on patrol only ten miles away.[xxxvi] Four sailors were killed. This attack put the Israeli Navy on alert, but did not deter their blockading efforts. In fact, the blockade was the last vestige of coercion exhibited by the Israelis, in place well after the cease-fire. It was turned over to a multi-national United Nations naval task force, led by the German destroyer *Mecklenburg*, upon implementation of UN resolution 1701.

In judging effectiveness, the naval blockade of coastal Lebanon failed to show an appreciable effect on Hezbollah's arms supply. This was in part due to Hezbollah's significant stockpile of weapons, as well as perhaps other smuggling methods (although several airborne arms shipments into Beirut were alleged to have been interdicted). In only a month, Hezbollah launched nearly 4,000 rockets on Israel[xxxvii], and the frequency did not appear to diminish due to material shortages. However, had the conflict gone longer – and had Israel maintained the endurance to continue interdiction operations – the blockade would

have likely seen more tangible results. If the blockade was not directly effective against Hezbollah and its arm supplies, then it certainly must be considered so for its indirect success. The Israelis immediately made their military point, putting Hezbollah on international notice. Economically, the blockade was costing Lebanon $50 million a day in lost trade.[xxxviii] By holding the Lebanese populace hostage, the blockade increased pressure on both the Lebanese government and the international community to find a solution and quell the hostilities. The rocket attacks could have gone on longer, but the blockade - in a major role - helped limit the fighting to only thirty-four days.

Conclusions

The cases above illustrate several modern maritime blockades of varying levels of success across a range of operations. They were all naval in character, but most had other joint components that either limited or amplified their success. Two (North Vietnam and Iraq) were against conventional nation-states, and the other two were meant to disrupt insurgents. What does this all mean for joint force commanders? One can distill several lessons from what the case studies accomplished (or failed to) *directly* and *indirectly*.

Examining blockade's direct effectiveness is best determined through the operational factors of time, space and force. Space, it would appear, is the overriding determinant in blockade. If the blockaded area is not adequately patrolled, then a blockade against any enemy cannot be effective. The larger the coastline and airspace that requires monitoring and denial, then obviously the greater dedication of force (or leverage of technology) will be required. Vietnam's self-blockade proved that a large force over a long time may have little tangible effect if all land boundaries are not also controlled; the blockade of Iraq demonstrated how devastating one can be with those borders fairly secure. Furthermore, a

land-locked country devoid of the "pressure points" applied by naval blockade would be insulated from its effects. By contrast, a maritime nation – especially an island or peninsula – remains very susceptible to blockade's pressure. This remains a valid principle since the days of sail, and with today's dependence on global trade, is even more apparent.

The relationship of space to force is critical. In 1895 Mahan stated "Whatever the number of ships needed to watch those in an enemy's port, they are fewer by far than those that will be required to protect the scattered interests imperiled by an enemy's escape."[xxxix] Mahan's maxim still holds credence today, in terms of both military (naval) and commercial value. Blockades as a concept rely upon superior forces. Technology has allowed for greater areas of space to be monitored by the blockading power, but it has also increased risk on the "close" blockade. The Israeli blockade demonstrated that even non-state actors might procure weapons capable of countering a blockade, at greater distances. Had Hezbollah fighters been able to launch salvos of anti-ship missiles, Israeli enforcement may have been rendered ineffective. Vietnam proved the age-old mine is still effective as a force, especially considering that minesweeping and neutralization is a complicated and expensive process. However, mines are the least discriminating of blockade methods, and are generally applicable only to chokepoints. It is additionally impossible to offensively mine without considering neutrals, the law, and international support. The United States continues to place an emphasis on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance forces (satellites, MPRA, and UAVs) that can provide persistent surveillance of large areas. *Market Time* showed their value, but surface forces are still required to interdict and inspect – hence they are most discriminatory of forces.[xl] It is difficult to imagine a future blockade that does not maintain a distinct and careful discrimination between belligerents and neutrals.

Blockades need time to be directly effective. In the case of Lebanon, the conflict itself ended before the blockade was afforded time to achieve direct operational results. The sanction enforcement of Iraq lasted thirteen years, but perhaps best demonstrated the long-term effects of blockade. It was not successful at all times, but caused that country to atrophy, especially militarily, from within.

When judged by a measure of *direct* effectiveness, then, blockades should be thought of in terms of interactions and relationships of space, time and force. More (or better) joint forces available over a greater amount of time make blockade a worthy consideration. Blockade's direct usefulness is further amplified if that force is employed over a favorable area. One that is geographically isolated (or an enemy with manageable sea, land, and air borders) and is susceptible to trade/arms restrictions suggests greater success.

While a careful study of the direct effects of blockade is worthwhile, it is in concert with its *indirect* effects that blockade becomes such a powerful tool. Blockade can attack an enemy's strategic and operational centers of gravity circuitously, without a shot fired. It demonstrates the resolve of a nation or coalition, and can by a show of force and commitment deter an aggressor. It allows JFC's to reap force savings elsewhere, likely in boots-on-the-ground. In the complex calculus of armed conflict, blockade offers the Commander an option to deter and erode, all at the same time. The North Vietnam and Iraqi cases, where tight blockades degraded a later ability to fight, validate this point. Additionally, it is not binary, but scalable. A blockader can vary the pressure like a rheostat, by adding to the contraband list or tightening the noose to further deny an enemy freedom of action. Even if operationally ineffective, blockade can still contribute to the overall strategic goal with its psychological impact. The Israeli blockade - although a slow tourniquet that

withered the appendage vice surgically removing the Hezbollah cancer – still helped to achieve a quick cease fire favorable to the blockader. In the end, blockade's indirect capabilities alone or in conjunction with other joint operations provide the JFC added flexibility when applying operational art.

Recommendations

Blockade remains a viable method of coercion across the range of military operations as well as in the realm of the diplomatic and economic. For the U.S., blockade has never been formally "taken off the table" as an obsolete mission, and many ongoing operations today are in effect special function blockades by other names. NATO's *Operation Active Endeavor* (OAE), the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), and Joint Interagency Task Force-South's (JIATF-S) counter-narcotics operations are really all subsets or variations on the theme. In particular, PSI takes a broad view of what constitutes a blockade, seeking to deny and disrupt worldwide transit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) with 100% effectiveness.[xli] These operations greatly contribute to interoperability and are in effect a solid training program for the navies involved. For the U.S., they should be continued with or without the assistance of other nations, and not solely for their intrinsic operational value. They provide a meaningful set of tasks relevant to the larger concept of blockade and ensure a "knowledge gap" like the opening days of the 1990 Iraq blockade is avoided.

The CJCS Universal Joint Task List assigns "Plan and execute quarantine/embargo and blockade" as operational tasks to maritime, land, air, space and special operations.[xlii] Additionally, the 2007 U.S. Maritime Strategy makes note of imposing "local sea control whenever necessary."[xliii] However, there is little mention of blockade as an operational concept in much of U.S. military doctrine. Joint Publication 3-0 (*Joint Operations*) only

identifies blockade as a method of maneuver and counter-mobility.[xliv] Joint Publication 3-15 (*Barriers, Obstacles, and Mines*) from April 2007 authorizes the use of sea mines "in the event of war" but fails to clarify any operational considerations related to blockade other than "establishing blockades to provide political leverage in a limited war situation."[xlv] Similar slights are noticed in *Joint Interdiction* (JP 3-03), which mentions blockade only in a chart describing escalation techniques.[xlvi] None of the joint or overarching U.S Navy publications provides a clear definition for blockade, although the draft Naval Warfare document (NDP 1, in revision since 2000) does to its credit address maritime interception operations and exclusion zone enforcement.[xlvii] This is not surprising given the many negative connotations the term "blockade" elicits. The challenge and recommendation then is to improve joint and naval doctrine by fully incorporating blockade, to highlight blockade's legal limitations, and to identify the significance of joint operations in contributing to the effects of blockade.

In the right environment and under the right circumstances, blockade is the right operational tool. It can deter and coerce, prevent and deny. Considering the United States' traditional and potential adversaries, blockade should remain in the Navy's portfolio of options. Judged against recent case studies, it has utility against conventional aggressive powers, rogue states, and in limited situations failed states and non-state entities. It could feasibly leverage states that harbor terrorists to give up their sanctuary, and prevent others from spreading dangerous materials like ballistic missiles and WMD. For joint commanders, blockades should not be considered an obsolete Nelsonian method of sea control, but a powerful tool capable of affecting an enemy's operational and strategic centers of gravity, both directly and indirectly. As a traditional and strong sea power, the United States maintains the ability to blockade, and should not forget its lessons.

Notes

[i] Roger W. Barnett, "Regional Conflict Requires Naval Forces", *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 118, no. 6 (June 1992), 32.
[ii] Edward W. Eberle, "Messenger Pigeon Service For Naval Purposes", *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings* 21, no. 4 (1895), 835-850.
[iii] U.S Navy, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Marine Corps, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower* (Washington, DC: Pentagon, October 2007).
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